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ABSTRACT

An effective junior-year student teaching program in elementary education was designed that combines application of theory learned in methods courses with practical school experience. The objective was to prepare education majors for student teaching and to give them an opportunity to evaluate themselves and the prospects of a teaching career. Students attend methods classes for the first 5 weeks of the semester to build teaching skills. During the last 10 weeks of the semester, students teach elementary school students 2 days a week and attend campus courses the last 3 days of each week. They are required to teach reading, social studies, and science to both large and small groups of children. All field work is supervised by college instructors and cooperating school teachers who volunteer for the program. The program depends upon the cooperative efforts among the university faculty and the public school teachers who take part in the program. One important factor in the success of the program has been the direct involvement of teachers and supervisors in planning and implementing the program and the incorporation of teachers' suggestions into the program. Student responses to the design and content of the program have been overwhelmingly favorable. (JD)

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JUNIOR BLOCK: A FIELD ORIENTED CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR THE BLENDING OF THEORY AND APPLICATION IN ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article describes an elementary education program that blends educational theory with real-life teaching situations. Five college methods form the foundation for the courses and field-experience which permits pre-student teachers to teach elementary students two days each week for approximately one semester. The program has proven quite successful as shown in the positive reactions from students and cooperating teachers.

JUNIOR BLOCK: A FIELD ORIENTED CURRICULUM
DESIGN FOR THE BLENDING OF
THEORY AND APPLICATION IN ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education institutions have begun developing programs which provide more real-life, field experiences for prospective teachers. The idea of more and earlier field-based experiences create the setting for relating classroom theory to practical life situations in teaching. Krajewski and Barger (1974) cite pre-student teaching clinical experiences as the type of experiences which make the work of the campus-based courses more relevant when tied into a real teaching situation. Similarly, Goldenberg (1977) said that a proper blending of field experiences and campus programs is an excellent way to prepare teachers.

Our junior year field experience is based on the concept of blending theory with practice. The idea is rather simple: teacher candidates teach elementary students two days a week in surrounding public schools and attend campus courses the last three days each week. All field work is supervised by college instructors each day the students are in the field.

The success of this three-year program can be attributed to the cooperative efforts among the university faculty and the public school teachers who take part in the junior year field program. Teachers and college instructors initially attended joint planning sessions one year prior to implementating the program. One key to the success of this program has been in implementing public school teacher's suggestions into the program. Everyone in the program were directly involved in the development and evaluation of the Junior Field Program. Currently the Junior Field Program is running smoothly in three different school districts.

Philosophical and Theoretical Basis of Field Experiences

The elementary education department believe field experiences: must combine application of theory learned in the classroom to practical school settings; must provide pre-student teacher with understanding of the needs, learning process, interest, ab'lities, and attitudes of children and their relationship to instructional practices; must insist that pre-student teachers use books, equipment, instructional material, and other educational aids to enhance instructional procedures; must provide feedback for pre-student teacher growth and self-evaluation; must require lesson planning for each teaching experience must be a professional experience with appropriate dress, ethical behavior and personal conduct in evidence at all times.

Description of the Elementary Education Department's Junior Year Field Based Program

The Junior Year Field Based Program includes five three credit courses: Teaching Social Studies, Teaching Reading II, Child Development, Teaching of Elementary Science, and Audio Visual Education. Students attend campus classes for the first five weeks of the semester to learn skills for developing lesson plans, units, and instructional aids. The last 10 weeks of the semester students teach in the public schools on Monday and Tuesday. These students are then required to teach reading, social studies and science to both large and small groups of children. The remaining three days of each week is spent on campus to continue with their college methods courses. A typical schedule for the Junior Block participant is presented in Figures 1 and 2.

FIGURE 1

Typical First Five Week Schedule

8:00 10:00		Science Lab			
9:00 10:00	Child Dev.				Comm. Media
10:15 12:15	Social Studies	Teaching Reading	Teaching Science	Child Dev.	
1:00 2:00			Social Studies	Teaching Reading	
3:00 5:00			Comm. Media		
	On Campus	On Campus	On Campus	On Campus	On Campus

FIGURE 2

Typical Ten Weeks Schedule

8:00 10:00	Preparation of materials for teaching Reading, Social Studies and Science	Preparation of materials for teaching Reading, Social Studies and Science			
9:00 11:00	Learning Center Bulletin Boards Case Studies	Learning Centers Bulletin Boards Case Studies			Comm. Media
10:00 12:15	Co-op and Supervisor Conference	Co-op and Supervisor Conference	Science	Child Dev.	
1:00 3 00	Development of Sociograms	Development of Sociograms	Social Studies	Reading	
	In the Field	In the Field	On Campus	On Campus	On Campus

Presently, eleven university faculty and forty-five public school teachers work cooperatively in teaching sixty juniors per semester. Important, also, is to emphasize that faculty volunteered for this program. No one was arbitrarily assigned to teach in the program. This is yet another factor in insuring a successful field based program.

Of the eleven university faculty, three serve as the field coordinators--one for each of the public school sites. The field coordinator is responsible for scheduling students into the schools and for making sure that at least one university faculty is scheduled to be at the school each day to observe and supervise.

The cooperating teachers are also volunteers who provide the variety of experiences for the pre-student teachers. These teachers oversee the pre-student teacher's lesson planning, instructional aids, units, learning centers and bulletin boards. The cooperating teacher conducts periodic conferences with the pre-student teacher and the university supervisor. Topics discussed in the conferences include information about the pre-student teacher's competencies, elementary school curriculum requirements, and suggestions for improved teaching techniques.

Cooperating teachers provide in-depth evaluations concerning the pre-student teacher's field experiences and progress to the university supervisors.

Evaluation of the Junior Block Program

Student responses to several Likert type statements are presented in the following tables. Responses toward the five courses were overwhelmingly positive. Table 1 presents student responses to: (a) Course Requirements, and (b) Content Organization.

TABLE 1

Response to the Statements: A. Course Requirements Were Clear, and B. Course Content was Organized

Subject		Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reading						
	A.	40%	48%	9%	3%	0%
	B.	40%	40%	12%	8%	0%
Child Development						
	A.	16%	65%	16%	3%	0%
	B.	11%	58%	20%	11%	0%
Science						
	A.	25%	67%	8%	0%	0%
	B.	6%	48%	18%	28%	0%
Social Studies						
	A.	22%	45%	9%	12%	12%
	B.	9%	40%	20%	22%	9%
Communications Media						
	A.	42%	42%	8%	8%	0%
	B.	56%	36%	8%	0%	0%

Again, students responded positively to statements related to the field based program. Both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor were positively perceived. Students overwhelmingly said the experience prepared them for both student teaching and for when they were hired in the public schools. Students said the experience made them more confident of their abilities. Finally, the students unanimously agreed that the field courses were an improvement over campus methods courses. Table 2 presents the students' responses to statements concerning program effectiveness.

TABLE 2

Student Response to Program Effectiveness

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My cooperating teacher provided guidance when needed.	52%	36%	8%	4%	0%
2. The university supervisor provided guidance.	28%	45%	23%	3%	0%
3. The field program was an improvement over taking the courses separately on campus.	88%	8%	4%	0%	0%
4. I feel more confident that I will succeed in teaching	65%	34%	1%	0%	0%
5. The field experience prepared me for student teaching.	74%	23%	3%	0%	0%
6. My overall rating as a perspective teacher is higher.	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%

Concluding Statement

The Junior Year Field Based Program, in the opinions of cooperating teachers, pre-student teachers, and university faculty, is a glowing success. The efforts of everyone involved in the program are rewarded with final products who will go on to effectively teach kids.

Continuous evaluation will be made through input from the pre-student teachers, cooperating teachers, administrators, and university faculty. Questions currently being explored are: What time frames should be lengthened or shortened in the program? What theories are relevant? Not relevant? Which experiences enhance participants' progress? Which do not? Should the field sites be expanded? Should additional subjects be included? Are there revisions needed for cooperating teachers? Are workshops needed.

Teacher candidates, through the Junior Year Field Based Program, now have the opportunity to assess themselves earlier in terms of teaching as a career goal. Billings (1940) wrote:

> As a matter of economic logic, and in fairness to young people who ought to be spared the disappointment and demoralization of outward vocational failure, steps ought to be taken to eliminate the least promising prospects as early as possible in the teacher education process so that over-supply of certified teachers may be kept small.

What was true almost half a century ago is still true today - early field expereinces help improve the quality of teaching. We feel that our Junior Program does just that!

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